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Attention is focused on the profession's current concern over the formidable problems involved in a language teacher's attempting to interpret a target culture with generalizations that might well be non-verifiable when scrutinized by such areas specialists as cultural anthropologists, behavioral psychologists, psycholinguists, semanticists, and literary critics. A discussion of these problems includes descriptions of the (1) relationship of language and culture, (2) factors of interaction and partial knowledge, and (3) choice of appropriate materials. Brief explanations of the pluralistic, semiotic, sociolinguistic, structural, semantic, methodological-imitative, area studies, and cultural anthropology methods of presenting cultural knowledge in the classroom are presented. Also considered are the problems involved in understanding a foreign culture. (AF)

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A Tentative Outline of Problems in the Knowledge, Understanding, and Teaching of Cultures Pertaining to the Target Language

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I. Problems in the Knowledge of a Foreign Culture

The Relationship of Language and Culture

In spite of the fact that many competent anthropologists, linguists and humanists have written extensively on this relationship, foreign language teachers have paid little attention to it. Yet, such reluctance is understandable if we consider that to explore this relationship meaningfully the foreign language teacher, a person in charge of imparting skills or literature, is not prepared at all to analyze the relationship of culture and language because to do so would mean a systematic knowledge of fields that lie outside of his province. Even today the language teacher who ventures outside of this province to examine the framework of culture and language is rare indeed; and what is more, he will largely be considered an amateur, suspect or ignored by anthropologists, linguists, or behavioral psychologists.

For the traditional foreign language teacher the problem of relating language to culture never arose at all since he largely chose to remain within the boundaries of grammar, syntax, philology and literary criticism—cultural considerations being purely incidental. Thus the rise of cultural anthropology and linguistics developed without stirring much interest in the ranks of the traditionalists. With the advent of audio-lingual methodology, its advocates proceeded to apply some linguistic principles to the teaching of language skills, but at the same time took little notice of the interaction between language and culture. As far as culture is concerned, the main interest of the methodologists consists in the assumption that by absorbing language patterns existing in the target language the learner would be recreating the mental processes which produce these patterns. Implicit in this assumption we find the unwarranted belief that mastering the language patterns or skills leads in itself to cultural knowledge that acts upon the language.

To the cultural anthropologist, of course, language is a phenomenon structured and motivated by its culture and used in a largely unconscious manner. Not surprisingly, anthropologists have suggested that a foreign culture should be presented to the foreign language student before exposing him to the target language.

We do not necessarily have to solve all the theoretical questions concerning the ways in which culture is affected by language or in what way language belongs to the framework of culture. But we should consider culture as a dynamic force that shapes the thought and language of those participating in its framework to the point of making it necessary to understand the value system that underlies verbalization.

Factors of Interaction and Partial Knowledge

A major problem arises if we attempt to analyze and measure the interaction taking place between language and culture. The French anthropologist Lévi-Strauss reminds us that the impact of culture "as a whole" on language "as a whole" has yet to be evaluated. As a structuralist Lévi-Strauss expects to derive meaning not from an analysis of social, linguistic or psychological phenomena, but by relating, comparing and opposing these phenomena within a cultural structure.[1]

The multiplicity of these interactions raises, of course, a number of problems. Remembering that anthropologists, linguists and psychologists have each developed a number of partially conflicting theories about value systems and behavioral processes, we are left with what has been called the "iceberg" problem: namely, guessing what invisible parts are attached to the surface aspect of a given cultural manifestation.

If we establish a graphic relationship, assigning A = cultural patterns, B = semantic patterns, C = psychological processes, and D = behavior, we could ask ourselves about the direct and indirect impact of A, B and C on D. While the anthropologist sees the relationship of A→B, the semanticist might establish verbal behavior by considering A→B→C or even B→A→D, whereas the behavioral psychologist would want to consider A and B→C →D. Thus any generalizations on a cultural phenomenon would depend on how and to what extent the "submerged" part of the phenomenon will be explained. In examining, for instance, concepts such as *Weltangst*, *enamorar-enamorarse* or *le bon sens*, the evaluation of these concepts and of the behavior motivated by them would vary widely according to each approach.

We could also return to Lévi-Strauss's inquiry and ask: Is A acting "as a whole" on B or on B and D? How can we approach culture "as a whole" if we are not able to do that with regard to a foreign language? If the student is not able to operate within the framework of a foreign language until its basic aspects have been digested, how can he operate within a foreign culture? What partial relationships emerge for the student after, say, one culture course or, worse yet, after having finished a language course "bolstered" by cultural information? How misleading would such partial knowledge be? After a presentation in a third-year Spanish course of the Spanish affinity

[1] *Structural Anthropology*, New York: Basic Books, 1963, p. x–xii.

for individualism, the one-sided effect of this presentation on the students was extreme, as evidenced by their answers in a test a part of which was covering such material. Of course, to offset such one-sided presentations through "total" cultural approach would demand unrealistic amounts of classroom time.

Choice of Materials

Connected to the problems of a selective presentation of a foreign culture is the choice of appropriate material. On this material falls largely the difficult burden of bringing to the classroom vital aspects of the target culture, both analytically and synthetically. Excluding here any considerations of visual material, we find a huge variation in the types of written material at hand.

If we arbitrarily establish a spectrum based on validated information, on one end of the spectrum we would have verified data concerning a foreign culture, usually in the form of field studies, statistical analyses or controlled research projects done by social scientists. Such studies are extremely technical and limited in their scope; and thus they would be largely inappropriate for a general approach to foreign cultures since there would be little time or need to consider how a certain subgroup reacts to a given norm or condition. Even if the use of such materials were desirable, they would be largely unavailable in our study of cultures representing underdeveloped nations.

Next we could consider works by social scientists that include broad aspects of a culture in a single work. Books like *Plainsville USA* by James West dissect a typical town by examining major social categories, activities, attitudes, expectations and norms.[2] Watson and Carr brought out *The Social Sciences and American Civilization* in which they focus on urban society, community values, social stratification, family structure and basic ideologies. Works of this type carry enough bibliographical evidence to make them acceptable from the scholarly point of view; but again, we might look in vain for similar works for our study of the target culture.

Between the generalizations of the social scientists and the purely literary essay we could place works that combine sociological training and observation with a deep humanistic awareness. The range is rather wide here as we move from works like David Riesmann's *The Lonely Crowd* and Vance Packard's *The Status Seekers* to such cultural commentaries as André Siegfried's *L'Ame des Peuples*, Count Keyserling's *Meditaciones Sudamericanas*, Salvador de Madariaga's *Ingleses, Franceses y Espanoles* or Ernest Bremstad's *Aristocracy and the Middle Classes in Germany*. In all of these works the author consciously adopts a personal and speculative point of view, often developing ideational concepts and even cultural theorems which are extremely thought-provoking and humanistically appealing but which at the same time leave us with the problem of how to validate these assertions. The problem of validation becomes naturally more acute as we move in the strictly literary essay or in what today is called parasociology.

Completing the spectrum we should consider the use of fiction to illustrate expressions of a given culture. Such a use has been defended on the grounds that all art is based on a conscious or unconscious contact with social reality and cultural patterns, present in the mind of the creative writer. Here the problem arises of determining which types of literature or art forms are most suitable to elicit cultural patterns or indicators. A case might be made for those forms that strongly reflect an outer social reality. The writers of Spanish picaresque novels, French naturalistic prose or *die neue Sachlichkeit* would offer much more material for our cultural analysis than the creators of an inner reality via psychological, surrealistic or experimental writing.

Of course, if we hope to derive a cultural interpretation through semantic or linguistic analysis, any division between realistic and nonrealistic writing would be superfluous. However, the difficulties of a valid interpretation increase proportionately with such a step. Howard Lee Nostrand, who has dedicated more time and effort than anyone known, to the problem of foreign culture teaching and the

[2] This book was written by an anthropologist, Carl Withers, under the name of West in 1945. It is somewhat of a classic in its general presentation of small-town life in America. Today such an approach is rare among social scientists.

possibility of deriving cultural indicators from literature, makes a good case for such methods in his *Exemples Littéraires*, part of his exhaustive study *Outline of Teaching of French Culture*.[3] It should be noted, however, that he acknowledges the difficulties and limitations that are inherent in such an approach to culture teaching.

Quite expectedly, the treatment of literature as a possible source for cultural information has its critics. On one hand social scientists show extreme skepticism as far as the validity of using literary examples as cultural indicators is concerned. On the other hand, professors of literature, already on the defensive against methodologists, will be suspicious about treating literature as a means to an end that for them lies outside of the realm of literature and languages, unless they were to consider that culture knowledge can establish added dimensions in the critical analysis of the literary works.

Teaching Methods

As to methods of presenting culture knowledge in the classroom, there seem to exist a number of possible approaches. In this respect the teacher of a foreign culture seems to operate on the level akin to that of the literature teacher who has the choice of explaining his material in a number of ways. He can choose a stylistic, historical, psychological, generic, archetypal or pluralistic analysis as he pleases, although he could seldom hope to have the time, knowledge or inclination to use more than one type for a given literary work. After reading Dr. Jones' psychological analysis of Hamlet one does not expect him to do a Marxian one. Let us very briefly consider various methods of presenting a foreign culture.

The *pluralistic method*. This approach would be elastic enough to allow for any feasible analysis of any material belonging to the target culture and have the advantage of allowing the instructor to operate eclectically within the limitations of his experience, knowledge and training. However, such a presentation would probably lack consistency and continuity, two elements that our students generally expect if they are to function properly in the classroom.

The *structural method*. This approach leads to the knowledge of cultural components largely through the use of comparative and contrastive techniques, such as applied by Lévi-Strauss and his followers. This approach would have the advantage of operating partly within the field of the student's cultural experience since he is able to draw from his own culture to examine social goals, motivations or ideational concepts such as youth fixation, the spirit of competition or the work-reward concept. It is noteworthy, however, that anthropologists like Margaret Mead consider such contrastive techniques as undesirable "straight-jackets."

The *semiotic approach*. A relatively recent procedure used to interpret elements in a foreign culture. Here we have the attempt to construct a system of signs and signifiers within the context of a foreign culture to explain primary or secondary meanings in visual, conceptual or linguistic symbols that would not be known to those who are not participating in that culture. Professors Ehrmann and Beaujour have made a good case for such a method in their paper, *A Semiotic Approach to Culture*. To present their own examples of this method, *jeudi* would be explained within the context of the French school week and the *bêret* would be interpreted as a symbol of the French *petit-bourgeois* to the American student for whom the *bêret* denotes a bohemian quality.[4] Quite purposely, any speculative, behavioristic or mechanistic explanations or interpretations are eliminated on the ground that the instructor does not possess the qualifications to venture into areas such as anthropology, semantics or psychology, a very honest position that recognizes the limitations of our knowledge concerning a foreign culture.

The *sociolinguistic approach*. To establish cultural and linguistic prototypes in a foreign

[3] This monumental work of which *Exemples Littéraires* represents only one segment of three divisions (the other two and by far the largest deal with aspects of French and American culture respectively) was done under the heading of Final Report of Project OE-6-14-005 for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

[4] Michel Beaujour and Jacques Ehrmann, "A Semiotic Approach to Culture," *Foreign Language Annals*, Vol. I, No. 2 (December, 1967), p. 155.

culture might be largely misleading since the human being acts mainly within the framework of sub-groups. Membership in the socio-economic or ethnic sub-group will be accompanied by a corresponding mental outlook and use of language. We seem to live today in an era of increasing cultural nationalism that isolates ethnic and cultural segments within nations. It should also be considered that the female point of view and expression vary significantly from that of the male, and more attention might be paid to this problem. (Professor Nostrand indeed has a fairly long chapter on the French woman in his *Société et Culture Française*, but much of it deals with social activities.)

Especially in using parasociological material, it might be unsatisfactory to identify the intellectual's position as that of a spokesman for the middle or lower classes. We are apt to forget that such writings are for all purposes produced by a minute segment of the population. In Latin America, for instance, the intellectual artist and writer usually shows his aversion to a United-States brand of materialism and pragmatism by adopting a spiritual-idealistic position. On the other hand, the Latin American businessman and the teenager of today show great admiration for the "American way-of-life," but their views seldom reach our teachers or the classroom.

The *semantic approach.* While linguists do not venture beyond the analysis of the morpheme, general semanticists deal, among other things, with the interpretations of meanings and forms to derive inferences on cultural thought and behavior. In studying a foreign culture, the derivation of its values, attitudes and beliefs through semantic analysis is indeed as fascinating as it is desirable, but the obstacles involved are many. It is purposeful to judge the use of the French *utile* and to contrast it with the American *proper* within a translated context, as Mr. Edmund Glenn has done in his paper *Meaning and Behavior; Communication and Culture.*[5] But as soon as we leave the contextural meaning and comparison and begin to make cultural inferences based on such patterns, ascribing collective traits to the users of such patterns, we are on highly speculative grounds. The dynamics of change in modern societies separate form from essence as fast as pseudo-meanings develop in our present-day advertising and entertainment media. The extensive use of the subjunctive in Romance Languages or the compounding of nouns in Germanic tongues shows *in essence* a cultural significance, but the majority of speakers in any culture pay little attention to the essential meaning of words and structures. Thus, can we make any definite postulation about the mentality or attitudes of the users of subjunctive forms or the impact of philosophical connotations of Germanic compound words on the speaker? Anthropologist Edward Hall tells us that the level of abstraction in semantic conceptions is too great to allow for anything but a limited insight into a culture, which makes any generalization about a "way of life" of a given society extremely difficult.[6]

The methodological-imitative approach. While the other alternatives in the field of teaching methods have as common denominator an analytical-cognitive basis of learning *about* foreign cultures, technically there exists, of course, the possibility of presenting methodological or programmed devices, particularly of a visual nature, which allow the student to operate on an imitative level in order to absorb the target culture. Here one could imagine the presentation of foreign cultural interaction or any kind of overt cultural behavior through visual means, and the exercising of a given situation in response drills, a technique that is similar to audio-lingual exercises. Actually the existing attempts of duplicating voice inflection and kinesics lie already in the field of imitating cultural behavior.

However, the problems involving such methods are immense since a knowledge of vital socio-psychological factors are involved that must be solved. Basically, two broad pedagogical issues are involved. One, the matter of validity as far as collective behavior is concerned; and two, the degree of psychological

[5] *The Journal of Communication*, Vol. XVI, No. 4 (December, 1966), p. 251.

[6] In the field of semantics we have a bewildering array of possible interpretations and schools from the classic by Ogden and Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (1930) to the present, and ranging from psychological to philosophical and sociological approaches.

adaptation needed to act or react as a person belonging to another culture.

While in the process of teaching a target language the social and individual variations are ignored in favor of a standard language that reflects an impersonal but verifiable, and thus acceptable, way of verbal expressions, a pattern for collective behavior for any culture has yet to be established by social scientists. Thus, a compromise acceptance of "average conduct" presents a high degree of difficulty because of the elusiveness of collective behavior and the fact that the foreign languages taught in American schools pertain to cultures whose societies show much wider class differences than those prevalent in the United States today, and therefore determine very divergent behavior patterns. An American news commentator whose pronunciation and use of English would be as close to a standard American English as one can hope for, represents a broad middle class background. His counterpart in European or Latin American countries represents neither socially nor linguistically an equally broad segment of his society. Thus our cultural models to be imitated will at no time represent more than one given class type. It would be really unthinkable to present the common attitudes and expressions of the Mexican *pelado* and his world to our students as a cultural model to be imitated; yet the *pelado* represents the bulk of the Mexican population.[7]

As to the psychological aspects of imitating cultural models belonging to the target culture, the whole matter of "thinking like a native," included erroneously in the audio-lingual attempts to duplicate genuine speech patterns without however preparing the learner culturally for such a task, needs the closest scrutiny by people qualified to explore the transference of values and behavior in the light of psychological changes that occur when forcing unaccustomed cultural patterns on our students. What has to happen in the mind of a boy from Kansas to make him react like an Italian when facing a teacher, a companion, or a girl? Do we want him to repeat cultural patterns or initiate them too? We know little about the psychological and neurological processes involved here. Psychologists like Professor Wallace Lambert and O. H. Mowrer have already contributed studies of the psychological aspects involved in the transference of culture regarding language students and made discoveries that should be seriously considered by language teachers. Opposing directly the views held by descriptive behaviorists like Professor Skinner and his followers who continue to ignore semantic, cultural or psychological forces in their mechanistic stimulus-response approach to language learning,[8] Lambert and Mowrer state that language learning is motivated by a psychological desire to imitate and learn a foreign language after the goal to imitate language patterns has been established. through an identification with the target culture.[9] A concerted effort will be needed to shed sufficient light on these problems in order to allow us to proceed with confidence in this area.

The *use of area studies*. This approach should be considered because it falls within the broad realm of methodic presentation of a foreign culture. We should at least ask ourselves whether a formal acquaintance with basic aspects of the area whose culture is to be studied, broken down into disciplines, could not serve as an adequate way to acquire essential knowledge about the target culture. Sociological, political, economic or geographic-demographic and historical forces shape every society and determine culture structures. Nelson Brooks in his article *The Ideal Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers* advocates such knowledge under his heading of *Formal Culture*.[10] From the instructional point of view there certainly is no doubt that the cooperative effort of experts in each of these fields could not be equaled by one teacher in charge of a culture course. But, how could such a cooperative venture function effectively within the confines of, say, a one-semester culture course? If the culture teaching is to be incorporated in

[7] See, for instance, the chapter on the *pelado* and his lower-class mentality, done by the Mexican essayist and cultural philosopher Samuel Ramos in his *Perfil del hombre y de la cultura en México*.

[8] Wallace E. Lambert, "Psychological Approaches to the Study of Language," *The Modern Language Journal*, Vol. XLVII, No. 2 (February, 1963), p. 55.

[9] *Op. cit.*, p. 115.

[10] Nelson Brooks, "The Ideal Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers," *The Modern Language Journal*, Vol. L, No. 2 (February, 1966), pp. 71–78.

a foreign language course, an area-study approach would not be feasible at all.

The *use of cultural anthropology.* Going one step beyond the interdepartmental teaching of a culture course, we should also consider the teaching of a foreign culture within the department of anthropology. Strictly speaking, a systematic analysis of a social value system and behavior is the province of cultural anthropology. Teachers of English or American literature do not attempt a presentation of American culture but send their students to the sociologist if they wish to learn about American society. Possibly the brave excursion of teachers of foreign languages and literatures into the field of culture teaching are efforts to fill a vacuum existing presently in the instruction of foreign cultures due to the lack of adequate staff or textbooks. But we are beginning to get anthropologists and sociologists in our academic institutions who have come to teach their native culture, a trend that surely will grow as quickly as such people are adequately trained. If the development of linguistics as a discipline independent from that of languages and literatures is any indication, the teaching of foreign culture will in the not too distant future be imparted outside of the departments of foreign languages.

II. Problems in Understanding a Foreign Culture

Implicit Aspects of a Foreign Culture

Obviously knowledge and understanding are inextricably intertwined; but in order to clarify some problems concerning culture learning let us separate these two processes into cognitive and intuitive aspects. Thus the understanding of a foreign culture would be associated with intuitive comprehension, centering around what anthropologists call the implicit aspects of culture, aspects considered too illusive to be used as a basis for accurate generalizations about cultural behavior or norms.

It would be impossible to state what percentage of a person's "average" daily activities concerning his thoughts, attitudes and behavior is carried out on an unconscious level. Apparently the amount of unconscious activity is considerable and thus must be studied in order to present a meaningful picture of the target culture. Nelson Brooks advocates the study of what he calls *deep culture* in the foreign language classroom and lists such components as individual thoughts, beliefs, concerns and all the subtle gradations of interpersonal relationships on the implicit level of culture.[11] It is quite apparent that a cognitive interpretation of a foreign culture will not penetrate into the semi-invisible layers of its texture. But, what kind of materials, teaching techniques and teacher preparation would be needed to attempt the presentation of the intrinsic-intuitive aspects of a foreign culture?

The Understanding of a Foreign Culture as a Teaching Problem

Possibly the understanding of a foreign culture relies more on teaching competence than materials. But, unless a teacher has a long and intimate acquaintance with the target culture and some systematic training to help him with his analysis as well as with the classroom presentation, he would turn out to be fairly much of an adjunct to the course material. Even a native teacher would be hardly more than an informant without adequate anthropological training. Being a native speaker does not *per se* qualify anyone to teach his language, and the same holds for the teaching of culture. Informants, newspapers, magazines, radio or TV programs all constitute in essence excellent "raw material" for the understanding of a foreign culture, but the burden is very much placed upon the instructor.

In the case of the non-native instructor the problem of ethnocentricity raises additional questions. We interpret an act or belief from a point of view anchored in our cultural framework. Thus a cultural event is often meaningless or at least misleading without being placed and evaluated within its proper context. We do not judge most events *per se*, but the circumstances surrounding them; otherwise, a society would, for instance, have to consider the act of killing *per se*, instead of the circumstances; but then it would not know when to hand out a medal or a noose. On a much less concrete level we have to take into consideration the nuances

[11] *Loc. cit.*

surrounding every gradation and interplay existing on the level of role playing, status conscience, prestige factors, myths or sentiments that operate largely in unconscious ways. How then can these largely unconscious forces that operate within the value systems of the target culture be accounted for by the non-native instructor?

The Understanding of a Foreign Culture as a Learning Problem

The problems of a non-native instructor discussed in the previous section naturally apply also to the non-native student. But since the student is also the learner and might have a limited objective, we should look into the relationship of knowledge or factual presentation of the target culture and the understanding or the internalizing of the cultural material at hand. To prepare a student to absorb a certain amount of cultural knowledge and to recognize such material is entirely different from asking him to evaluate "raw material" on his own by manipulating internalized knowledge. Thus we might want to differentiate between an active and a passive use of a foreign culture.

Objectives in the Understanding of a Foreign Culture

Although the business of understanding a foreign culture need not be justified, it might be useful to qualify it. Do we want the understanding of a foreign culture to become an end in itself just as literature is expected to be an end in itself? Should it rather be an instrument to understand literature or language more fully? Would our students use such understanding to deal more successfully with the people belonging to the target culture on, say, a governmental or business level? Is the study of the target culture to be basically an aid to utilize the target language on a more native level? People inside and outside of our profession continue to set up the goal of teaching our students to "think" in the target language without even considering whether the basic elements that make up the process of "thinking" in a foreign language or culture are linguistic, cultural, psychological or a complex interaction of all three elements. Within this context we should remember, that, as anthropologist Edward Hall put it, psychological-neurological processes with regard to behavior and thought patterns are still a mystery to us.

III. Concluding Remarks

In his *Essay on Man* Ernst Cassirer wrote that "contradiction is the very element of human nature," and therefore man's action cannot be fully comprehended in rational terms. To confirm this statement, during the month of November, 1967, according to the news service, three hundred "Anglo-Saxons" returning from a soccer match wildly demolished the interior of a London-bound train; that same month saw a new Puritan campaign decreed by the "Latin" rulers of Argentina.

The business of presenting cultural values, traits or behavior on the academic level is a risky one; and it should not surprise us that most social scientists shy away from generalizations concerning culture and concentrate on carefully controlled and verifiable research instead. A final but vital question arises at this point. Is it preferable from our professional point of view to have a language teacher incur the risks of presenting to our students generalizations about a foreign culture, generalizations that might well be non-verifiable in a number of instances, or should that consideration act as a deterrent? As teachers of literature we are conditioned to subjective and often conflicting interpretations of a given material, which truly might predispose us towards similar procedures in the field of culture. Those of us who have tried to enlist the collaboration of social scientists know of their suspicions toward a non-scientific approach to culture by "untrained" teachers.

The questions raised in this paper are many, but by no means do they cover more than a fraction of the problems involved in the teaching of a foreign culture. As Professors Ehrmann and Beaujour have indicated, the foreign language teacher who interprets the target culture is standing on a no-man's land, surrounded by territories belonging to cultural anthropologists, behavioral psychologists, psycho-linguists, semanticists and of course literary critics. In an age of specialization due to accumulated factual knowledge such a stand

would seem anachronistic and, for many, academically unsound. The interaction of language, thought and behavior is formidable indeed and should make us aware that any oversimplification or shortcut attempted in the presentation of a foreign culture to our language students will be scrutinized severely in a not too distant future by professionals armed with an overwhelming array of resources in the field.

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